

district, Gujarat. At Surat (21° 12' N, 72° 52' E), it is a common breeding species (Bakul Trivedi, Snehal Patel, Mukesh Bhatt, *pers. comm.*) Sightings at Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar during 1998 by Shri Lavkumar Khacher and Shri Lalsinh Raol (Raol 1999) indicate its western distributional limit in Gujarat.

It can be concluded that the purple-rumped sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* is an uncommon resident of Gujarat State, and occurs in Surat district, Shoolpaneswar Wildlife Sanctuary (Bharuch district) as well as Vadodara, Kheda,

Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar districts. Sálím Ali's remark (Ali 1955) that 'it seems curious that the species should be so rare in Gujarat' is clarified now.

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17. A SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE ON THE AVIFAUNA OF THE THAR DESERT (RAJASTHAN)

While birdwatching in the Thar desert between December 1985 and September 1999, I made extensive notes on the birds I encountered. It was, however, not until the publication of an annotated checklist of the birds of the Thar desert of Rajasthan (Rahmani 1997) which summarises the bird records of three surveys between February 1993 and May 1994, that I felt the need to publish my own sightings. Based on my experience in the area, I realised that the above mentioned checklist was not comprehensive. The purpose of this paper is to update Rahmani's list with additional records. Details of all records, both published and unpublished, are given for uncommon and rare species, while for those more frequent, only status and distribution are given.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Sixty-two species are listed below. The species' status in the Thar desert of Rajasthan is given in brackets as follows: R Resident; PR Presumably Resident; W Winter Visitor; S Summer Visitor; M Monsoon Visitor; PM Passage Migrant; V Vagrant; and (?) Status uncertain. Some of these are provisional, to be regarded as a general guide rather than a definitive statement. Common and scientific names are based on Manakadan and Pittie (2001).

Great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus* (W): Recorded in the eastern part of the desert where there are suitable wetlands. A party of 22 was seen at Kharda, Pali district on January 5, 1989. Two were seen at Sardarsamand, Pali district on the same day.

Black-necked grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* (W): One individual was observed at Kharda, Pali district on January 5, 1989.

Great white pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* (W): Fifteen were observed at Kagoda, Barmer district on February 19, 1994. Twenty were recorded on January 31 and one on March 15, 1998 at Revasa, Sikar district. Quite regularly seen at Sardarsamand, Pali district.

Spot-billed pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* (W): Ten were recorded at Revasa, Sikar district on January 31, 1998 in the company of great white pelicans.

Black-crowned Night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (PR): More than 76, including 15 juveniles, were roosting at Revasa, Sikar district on January 31, 1998.

Lesser flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor* (W): Regular in winter at Sambhar Lake in varying numbers. About 18,500 were censused between December, 1995 and March, 1996 at Sambhar Lake (Sangha 1998). 90 were observed feeding at Kagoda, Barmer district on February 19, 1994. Three birds were recorded at Sardarsamand, Pali district on January 5, 1989. About 200 were recorded at Badopal near Suratgarh and two birds near Chhatargarh, Bikaner district during the winter of 1994 (R.G. Soni *pers. comm.*)

Marbled teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris* (W): An increasingly rare migrant. It was classified as a straggler and reported in Rajasthan from Bikaner and Bharatpur (Ali and Ripley 1987). There are only three recent records from the area under consideration. On February 14, 1994 three birds were recorded at RD 1333 on the Rajasthan Canal (Indira Gandhi Nahar). One on February 15, 1994, at RD 1440 on the Rajasthan Canal (Indira Gandhi Nahar) near Mohangarh, Jaisalmer district (Sangha 1994) and three from Pali, in February 1991 (Tiwari 1991).

Comb duck *Sarkidiornis melanotus* (R): Irregularly seen in the eastern part of the desert, local movements subject to water conditions. Two

were recorded at Balsamand, Jodhpur district on January 15, 1989. Breeds at Nimaj, Pali district (Bhagirath Singh, *pers. comm.*). Listed as common by Hume (Whistler 1938).

Northern goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* (W): A rare migrant. First recorded from Rajasthan on January 3, 1990 at Gajner, Bikaner district, with an Indian sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* in its claws. I have not seen it at Gajner on subsequent visits.

Eurasian Sparrow-hawk *Accipiter nisus* (W): Six in a loose flock were seen attacking greater short-toed larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* at Tal Chhapar, Churu district on February 12, 1994. Two were recorded on January 28, 1996 and three on February 1, 1998 at the same place. Hume considered the species as very rare (Whistler 1938).

Bonelli's eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus* (R,W): Two were recorded at Fossil Park, Jaisalmer on January 12, 1986 (Phil Heath *pers. comm.*). One bird was observed drinking water at RD 845 on the Rajasthan Canal (Indira Gandhi Nahar) on February 13, 1994. Included by Hume and Whistler in their list (Whistler 1938).

Himalayan griffon *Gyps himalayensis* (W): Presumably a not so rare winter visitor, it seems to have been overlooked by bird watchers. One bird was seen near Mohangarh, Jaisalmer district on February 15, 1994.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* (W): Irregularly seen at Revasa, Sikar district as there has been no water for some years. At least one bird was sighted at Gajner, Bikaner, during December 1990 (R.G. Soni *pers. comm.*).

Merlin *Falco columbarius* (W): Rare winter visitor. Harsh Vardhan and I recorded one bird at Kanod, Jaisalmer district on February 15, 1994. The bird was hunting citrine wagtails *Motacilla citreola* near a shrinking waterbody. One bird was recorded on February 1, 1998 at Tal Chhapar, Churu district. A new record for Rajasthan.

Jungle bush-quail *Perdicula asiatica* (R):

Not uncommon in the eastern parts of the desert. Recorded from Revasa, Sikar district and Nimaj, Pali district.

Sarus crane *Grus antigone* (PR): Not uncommon in suitable areas of Pali and Jodhpur. Eight birds were recorded on March 28, 1993 at Sardarsamand, Pali district. A pair was seen and photographed at Navoda near Pachpadra, Barmer district in December 1998 (*Rajasthan Patrika*, December 6, 1998). Up to five birds were observed during December, 1998 at Nimaj, Pali district (Bhagirath Singh *pers. comm.*).

Pheasant-tailed jaçana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* (PR): Likely to become common with the development of large seepage water bodies in the Rajasthan Canal area. At least four birds were sighted on a large wetland near RD 507 on October 2, 1998.

Beach stone plover *Esacus magnirostris* (R): Confined to the eastern parts of the desert. 28 were recorded at Sardarsamand, Pali district on March 28, 1993. Two at Revasa, Sikar district on June 2, 1998. Probably breeds at both sites. Two birds were recorded at Kuchaman, Nagaur district on June 9, 1993. Reported by Hume in 'suitable river beds in Jodhpur' (Whistler 1938).

Small pratincole *Glareola lactea* (?): Five were recorded at Kuchaman lake, Nagaur district on October 25, 1991.

Sociable lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* (W): An increasingly rare species, though Hume rated it as common (Whistler 1938). There are three records from Tal Chhapar, Churu district. One juvenile was recorded from Revasa, Sikar district (Sangha 2000). Two birds were recorded from Jaisalmer on January 18, 1999 (Ben King *pers. comm.*).

Northern lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* (W): Uncommon winter visitor. I recorded four birds on January 3, 1990 at Gajner, Bikaner district. One bird was recorded at Jod Beed, Bikaner in winter, 1993 (M. Kulshreshtha *pers. comm.*). Adam saw it twice at Kuchaman, Nagaur district (Whistler 1938).

Grey plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (PM): Two were recorded on February 29, 1997 and two on May 3, 1998 at Sambhar Lake. 'A specimen of this bird in full breeding plumage was shot' at Sambhar Lake (Adam 1874).

Pacific golden-plover *Pluvialis fulva* (PM) One individual in total breeding plumage was observed on April 3, 1997 at Sambhar Lake. Hume mentions one specimen collected from Pali (Whistler 1938).

Greater sand plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* (PM): Five birds were recorded in partial breeding plumage on September 10, 1998 at Sambhar Lake. Also recorded by Adam at Sambhar Lake (1874).

Eurasian curlew *Numenius arquata* (W, PM): Many records. Sightings of 18 birds on October 25, 1991 and one on March 27, 1993 at Kuchaman, Nagaur district; five seen on August 13, 1994; two on May 3, 1998 and six on August 7, 1998 at Sambhar Lake; one at Tal Chhapar, Churu on January 28, 1996, one at Deedwana, Nagaur on February 1, 1998. Hume rated the species as rare (Whistler 1938).

Terek sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* (PM): One bird was recorded at Sambhar Lake on September 10, 1998. Previously recorded at Sambhar Lake (Adam 1873).

Jack snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus* (W): One bird was recorded on February 1, 1998 at Kuchaman lake, Nagaur. Although listed by Hume (Whistler 1938), the species was possibly uncommon in the desert then as it is today.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* (?) Per Undeland and I recorded 87 birds at Deedwana, Nagaur on February 1, 1998. Earlier at the same site, I recorded five birds on January 29, 1996. 13 were recorded on September 5, 1999 at Sambhar Lake. Four were in breeding plumage.

Curlew sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* (?) Per Undeland and I recorded 8 birds at Deedwana, Nagaur on February 1, 1998. 25 birds were recorded at Sambhar Lake on September 25, 1998. Two of the birds were still in breeding

plumage. Six were recorded on September 5, 1999 at Sambhar Lake.

Red-necked phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* (PM): 27 were foraging at Sambhar Lake on September 10, 1998. Two were recorded on a small pond close to the road near Revasa, Sikar district on September 12, 1998. Previously, specimens of this rare bird were obtained by Adam at Sambhar Lake (1874).

Herring gull *Larus argentatus (W, PM): Fairly common on Sambhar Lake.

Brown-headed gull *Larus brunnicephalus* (W, PM): Five were recorded at Gadisar, Jaisalmer on August 16, 1989. Fairly common on Sambhar Lake. Recorded by Whistler (1938).

Whiskered tern *Chlidonias hybridus* (W): Fairly common at Sambhar Lake and Revasa, Sikar district. Up to 250 were recorded at Sambhar Lake on September 23, 1996. Also at Badopal, Ganganagar district; Sardarsamand, Pali district and a wetland near RD 507 on the Rajasthan Canal (Indira Gandhi Nahar).

Gull-billed tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* (?): Seen all the year round in small flocks. Regular and fairly common at Sambhar Lake, Revasa and Deedwana. More than 100 birds were noted at Sambhar Lake on September 23, 1996. Five birds were hunting over a wheat field near Suratgarh, Ganganagar district on March 28, 1999. On May 23, 1999 three birds were observed hawking at Revasa, Sikar district.

Little tern *Sterna albifrons* (?): Summer visitor? Has been recorded at Revasa, Sikar district only in summer, where two pairs were recorded breeding in 1998 (Sangha and Kulshreshtha 1999). On May 23, 1999 I found one bird in breeding plumage at the same site.

Indian skimmer *Rhynchops albicollis* (V): There are two records from the desert area. The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) collected one bird from Dangiwas, Jodhpur on August 10, 1966. One bird was recorded at Jod-Beed, Bikaner on March 28, 1993 (Sangha and

Kulshreshtha 1998).

Painted sandgrouse *Pterocles indicus* (R): Fairly common in suitable areas of Sikar and Pali districts.

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* (R): Not uncommon in Jodhpur city, perhaps increasing (Prakash 1998). One bird was heard calling at Gajner, Bikaner district on March 29, 1999 and one was seen at RD 840 on the Rajasthan Canal on October 1, 1998.

Sirkeer malkoha *Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii* (PR): I observed one individual near Sardarsamand, Pali district on January 5, 1989. 'Dr. King collected a specimen at Jodhpur' in the rains (Whistler 1938).

Barn owl *Tyto alba* (PR): Probably a scarce resident. There are four records from the Thar desert. One bird collided with an aircraft at Jodhpur (Satheesan and Grubh 1992). I found a dead bird on the road near Dungargarh, Churu district on March 3, 1993, and one in the gloaming on March 25, 1993 near Kheechan with Harsh Vardhan. Between Ratangarh and Dungargarh, a dead bird was recorded on February 24, 1996 (Rishad Naoroji *pers. comm.*).

Eurasian eagle-owl *Bubo bubo* (PR): Not common, but seems to be widespread. Not listed by Whistler (1938). One bird was observed hunting during the day at Tal Chhapar, Churu district on October 23, 1988. One was being mobbed by house crows *Corvus splendens* while drinking water at the Rajasthan Canal at RD 1214 on February 13, 1994. One was seen at Akal Fossil Park, Jaisalmer on October 3, 1993.

Desert finch-lark *Ammomanes deserti* (R): All records are from Jaisalmer, where it is fairly common in suitable habitats. Affects desolate, barren country in rocky, gravelly areas (*magra*). Usually found in pairs or small groups (Sangha and Kulshreshtha 1993). Not recorded by Hume and Whistler (Whistler 1938). Ali and Ripley (1987) recorded it only from Jammu.

Red-rumped swallow *Hirundo daurica* (M, W): Quite widespread during monsoon.

* Now split into *L. heuglini* and *L. cachinnans*

Small numbers are recorded in winter also. More common in the eastern parts of the desert.

Red-backed shrike *Lanius collurio* (PM): Uncommon passage migrant. A single male bird was recorded near Khuri, Jaisalmer district on September 10, 1993. One female with very prominent crescent marks on breast and flanks was recorded on October 3, 1993 at Barna village, in the Desert National Park, Jaisalmer (Sangha 1995).

Eurasian golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus* (S, V): The bird breeds in the canal areas of Ganganagar, Hanumangarh and Bikaner. R.G. Soni (1994) also recorded its breeding in the canal areas.

Marshall's iora *Aegithinia nigrolutea* (R): A breeding resident in Jodhpur, Pali and Sikar districts. Recorded by Hume from Jodhpur and by Adam from Kuchaman, Nagaur district (Whistler 1938).

Red-throated flycatcher *Ficedula parva* (W): Very common in plantations in the canal areas of Ganganagar, Bikaner and Jaisalmer (Sangha 1995). I have recorded it from suitable habitats in Sikar, Pali and Jodhpur districts; regularly from Bada Bag, Jaisalmer and Tal Chhappar, Churu. Specimens were collected from Hemavas Lake (Whistler 1938). Also included in Hume's Jodhpur State list (Whistler 1938).

Grey-headed flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis* (W): A rare winter-migrant in the desert, but may increase in the canal areas. There is one record from Bajju, Bikaner district. It is not uncommon in wooded areas of Sikar district.

Blyth's reed-warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (PM): Common in wooded areas and plantations during spring and autumn passage. It begins to arrive from mid-August and continues to do so till late October in small waves. Spring passage starts from end of March and continues to mid-May. Commonly seen in the plantation along the Rajasthan Canal (Indira Gandhi Nahar) and at Tal Chhappar, Churu and Revasa, Sikar district.

Plain leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus neglectus* (W): It winters mainly in Pakistan and its current status in India is uncertain (Grimmett, Inskipp and Inskipp 1998), but I found it quite regularly in the Fossil Park and the Desert National Park, Jaisalmer. A new record for India.

Olivaceous leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus* (?): All records are of autumn and spring passage. One bird was recorded from the Desert National Park, Jaisalmer on March 4, 1990 (Sangha 1995). One bird was recorded at Tal Chhappar, Churu district on September 30, 1998. Two birds were recorded near Bajju, Bikaner district on March 28, 1999. La Personne collected specimens during the surveys of Jodhpur State (Whistler 1938).

Greenish leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* (?): I observed one individual on September 30, 1998 at Tal Chhappar, Churu district, feeding in the trees near the rest house.

Blue rock-thrush *Monticola solitarius* (W): Uncommon. One individual was recorded at Gajner, Bikaner district on January 3, 1990 and one on December 19, 1998 at the same place. Hume reported it from the neighbourhood of Jodhpur (Whistler 1938).

Orange-headed thrush *Zoothera citrina* (W): A rare winter visitor, but may become more common in the canal area. One bird was recorded between Bajju and Amarpura on February 13, 1994. Possibly the first record for the Thar desert.

Pied tit *Parus nuchalis* (R): The species is found in thorn forests of Pali and Nagaur districts of the desert. J.K. Tiwari (1997) found it in Jalore also.

Paddyfield pipit *Anthus rufulus* (PR): Not uncommon from Pali and Sikar, the eastern districts of the desert, where it possibly breeds. Also recorded from Badopal, Ganganagar and Diyatra, Bikaner on March 27, 1999. Hume received no specimen from Jodhpur (Whistler 1938).

White-Eye *Zosterops palpebrosa* (R): Fairly common in the eastern parts of the desert. I have recorded the species breeding in Jodhpur and Sikar districts. Listed by Whistler (1938).

Blackheaded munia *Lonchura malacca* (?): One bird was recorded during monsoon, 1994 near Mohangarh, Jaisalmer district. (R.G. Soni pers. comm.)

Trumpeter finch *Bucanetes githagineus* (W): All my recent records are from Jaisalmer district, although Hume collected a male near Jodhpur (Whistler 1938). Not uncommon in Jaisalmer. Numbers vary from year to year. Usually in parties of 6-7 birds. However, on January 12, 1986 more than 400 birds were observed feeding in a field on the west side of the road leading to the Fossil Park, Jaisalmer (Phil Heath pers. comm.).

Common rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* (?): Three birds were recorded in the plantation along the Rajasthan Canal (Indira Gandhi Nahar) near Bajju on March 23, 1999. One male was in breeding plumage. Rated as very rare by Adam (1873) at Sambhar Lake, who observed it on 'one or two occasions'.

Black-headed bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* (?): I recorded one male on March 27, 1993 with house sparrows at the Sudasri water-hole, Desert National Park. Hume found the species in 'simply millions' at Sojat, Pali district (Whistler 1938).

White-capped bunting *Emberiza stewarti* (W): I have recorded the species only from the eastern parts of the desert. Two males and one female were observed at Tal Chhappar, Churu district on February 1, 1998.

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18. STRANGE BEHAVIOUR IN THE RAT SNAKE *PTYAS MUCOSUS*, FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

We observed the following incident on July 20, 2001 between 1535 to 1550 hrs outside our office — the Conservation Education Centre, Bombay Natural History Society, Goregaon, Mumbai. An Oriental magpie-robin (*Copsychus saularis*) had laid four eggs in the battery box of a solar lamp post about three weeks earlier. The pale green eggs with reddish-brown spots were in a cup-shaped nest made of dry grass and twigs, resting in one corner of the battery box.

The eggs were intact and were being guarded regularly by the male and incubated by the female till the afternoon of July 20, 2001. We heard loud and harsh alarm calls by the robin at around 1525 hrs. Initially, we ignored it, as this behaviour is common for the robin when an intruder such as jungle babbler, squirrel or monitor lizard comes close to the nest.

This time, however, the calls were more intense and very loud. On looking at the lamp post, we saw a rat snake, *Ptyas mucosus* entering the battery box. As we went near to have a closer look, the snake slithered down, rushing towards

some bushes to hide. We immediately opened the battery box to see the status of the nest and found that only one egg was left. We thought that the game was over, as three eggs had been eaten by the rat snake, but after an interval of 5 minutes, the robin started making similar alarm calls at the same place. We rushed back and were surprised to see the rat snake in the battery box again! Out of curiosity we opened the battery box, and found that the snake had regurgitated the eggshells.

The fourth egg was left untouched by the snake.

January 18, 2002

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19. FIRST RECORD OF BOULENGER'S TREE FROG *CHIRIXALUS VITTATUS* (ANURA: RHACOPHORIDAE) FROM MIZORAM, NORTHEAST INDIA

Chirixalus vittatus was described by Boulenger (1887) from Bhamo, Upper Burma as *Ixalus vittatus*. The species was reported from India by Romer (1949) who collected two gravid females on June 7, 1944 near Kohima (then in Assam State). Khare and Kiyasetuo (1986) subsequently reported the species from Kohima, Nagaland.

A single specimen was collected by

Samraat Pawar and Sayantan Biswas, from a breeding site found near Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary, Lunglai district (Lai Autonomous District Council), southern Mizoram, during a survey conducted by them in 1998. The female was near a gelatinous foam-nest on *Saccharum* grass, about 3 m tall, nearly 50 m from the Forest Rest House of the Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary. They found the species to be locally common in